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The Frontline Supervisor

*Helping You Manage Your Company's
Most Valuable Resource - Employees*

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◆ I made a supervisor referral of my employee to the EAP, but only in writing. I have not discussed the referral in person with him. Should I meet with him, too? I think he knows what he needs to do.

Although you put your supervisor referral in writing, you should also meet with your employee to discuss it. Such a discussion will increase the likelihood of your employee accepting the referral. Remind your employee that use of the EAP is confidential and that the EAP professional will not disclose confidential information to you. Also remind the employee that use of the EAP will not jeopardize job security or promotional opportunities. These are standard elements in virtually all EAP policies, and they are issues of concern to employees that prevent follow-through with supervisor referrals. Indeed, most employees are not aware of, or may not remember, the provisions established by the organization's EAP policy. Provide a brochure of the EAP if you have one, the EAP phone number, and the name of the EAP professional.

◆ We referred one of our salespeople to the EAP because she was having trouble with customer relationships. We wonder if she is suited for the position. Can the EAP make this determination, so we can consider whether to keep her?

The EAP would violate its ethical code and purpose, and alienate the workforce, if it agreed to assist management in determining whether employees were suitable for their specific positions. Even in the unlikely event that an employee were willing to give permission to the EAP to play this role, it would violate EAP principles. EAPs assist employees in resolving personal problems that may affect job performance and provide services that support this purpose. The EAP would be seen as aligned solely with management's purposes if it played the role you describe. This would damage its reputation as a safe place to seek help. You should decide based upon the appraisal of your employee's performance or conduct whether she is suitable for the position. The EAP will do everything it can to assist her without impeding your management role.

◆ I supervise an employee who is very bright and witty, but difficult in her interpersonal communication. She and I don't get along. Still, I tolerate her style because we need her expertise. Can the EAP give me pointers to "put her in her place?"

Use the EAP to find and make personal changes that will help you create a more effective relationship with this employee. You may need a combination of increased assertiveness skills and increased tolerance for the style she brings to the workplace. Focus on deciding what is appropriate or inappropriate about her communication and what you can accept or not accept about it. Using the EAP for your own growth in this way and discovering how to manage a challenging relationship will be a more practical approach than considering the EAP as a "ring coach" in the conflict you are having with your employee.

◆ My employee loses a lot of work because of frequent migraine headaches. He is seeing the city's best migraine specialist, so I haven't mentioned the EAP to him. His performance is good, except when he is sick. What can the EAP do, since they aren't doctors?

Although most EAPs do not have medical doctors on staff, and certainly not those who specialize in treating migraines, EAPs sometimes accumulate knowledge about resources in the community that may surpass those of the most experienced doctor. Although the EAP would not prescribe treatment, they might share resources with your employee such as support groups, nutritionists, chiropractors, mental health and wellness professionals. Many types of resources have participated in the effective treatment of migraines. In some instances, employees may be unaware of such resources because the philosophy of a primary care giver may preclude referral of a migraine sufferer to such resources. Be careful not to rule out the type of help that the EAP might provide an employee with a performance problem. In this case, the supervisor referral would be based upon the performance issue associated with your employee's ongoing difficulty of being available to work.

◆ My employee has severe performance problems. I hesitate to refer her to the EAP because I fear the EAP might discover some personal problem that makes us feel our hands are tied. This could interfere with our ability to dismiss her. What should I do?

Although you do not say how long the performance problems have continued, it is not unusual for supervisors to consider the EAP role only at the point at which they are ready to dismiss an employee. Any delay or interference with the goal to dismiss becomes undesirable. The EAP will not disclose to you the nature of your employee's personal problems, if any exist. Regardless, EAPs cannot interfere with administrative decisions of the organization. It is possible that the EAP may salvage your employee. This will cause you concern if you have already made a decision to dismiss her. As a result, you will feel torn between allowing the EAP process to continue and moving forward with her dismissal. This is a common dilemma for supervisors who have not made supervisor referrals early, when performance problems were less severe. This frustration often leads supervisors to think that the EAP got in their way, even though it is they who have placed themselves in this position. .

Notes:

This information is intended only for the employees of your company. Please do not post it on a website that is accessible by the general public or by your company's clients.

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